

<b>Committee(s):</b> Public Relations and Economic Development Sub Committee	<b>Dated:</b> 10 October 2019
<b>Subject:</b> Party Conferences Report	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Bob Roberts, Director of Communications	<b>For Information</b>
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## **Summary**

The City of London Corporation delivers a programme of engagement at annual Liberal Democrat, Labour, Conservative, SNP and Green party conferences.

Members and officers attend these party conferences on behalf of the City Corporation, representing the organisation through attendance of City Corporation organised events, fringe events, bilateral meetings with political and business representatives and other networking opportunities.

This report provides Members with a summary of how party conference engagements are organised, who attends on behalf of the organisation and a breakdown of the costs of this year's party conference activities.

## **Recommendations**

Members are asked to:

- note the summary of how party conferences are organised, who attends on behalf of the organisation and a breakdown of the costs of the last two years' party conference activities; and
- discuss the current arrangements and provide a steer on future arrangements so a report with further proposals may be produced.

## **Main Report**

### **Background**

1. The City of London Corporation attends annual political party conferences, including the Liberal Democrat, Labour, Conservative, SNP and Green party conferences.
2. The City Corporation organises and sponsors both public and private events at Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative party conferences. In previous years the City Corporation has also hosted events at the Scottish National Party (SNP) conference.

3. The purpose of the City Corporation's activities at party conferences is to deliver a programme of strategic engagement on issues of importance to the organisation with relevant Ministers, politicians, policymakers and business figures.
4. City Corporation activities are considered on a yearly basis to adapt to the current political environment. However traditionally the City Corporation organises:
  - a. An invitation-only roundtable in partnership with a think tank at the Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative Party Conference. This roundtable is chaired by the Policy Chair and two members of PRED are invited to attend at the discretion of the former.
  - b. An invitation-only dinner hosting on average 50 people at the Liberal Democrat Conference, 100 people at Labour and 100 people at Conservative Conferences. The dinners bring together key local, regional and national political representatives, businesses, think tanks and academics. The Policy Chair gives a keynote speech as well as an external guest.
  - c. An additional open fringe event in partnership with a think tank at the Conference of the party in Government.
5. In May 2015 the PRED Sub Committee meeting it was decided all Members of this Public Relations and Economic Development Sub (Policy and Resources) Committee could attend party conference as City of London Corporation representatives as well as attending the City Corporation's private dinners. In addition, all Members of the City Corporation receive an invitation to the City Corporation's private dinners at Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative party conferences, provided they are already attending the aforementioned conferences in either a personal or professional capacity.
6. The number of Members attending party conference has increased due to the above-mentioned Committee decision and growing interest in Party conference in light of the current political context.
  - a. In 2016, 6 members attended the Liberal Democrat party conference, 6 members attended the Labour party conference and 6 members attended the Conservative party conference, one member attended the SNP conference
  - b. In 2017, 3 members attended the Liberal Democrat conference, 10 members attended the Labour party conference, 13 members attended the Conservative party conference, one member attended the SNP Conference
  - c. In 2018, 7 members attended the Liberal Democrat conference, 11 members attended the Labour party conference, 14 members attended the Conservative party conference, one member attended the SNP Conference

- d. In 2019, 9 Members attended Liberal Democrat party conference; 15 Members attended Labour Party conference; and 15 Members attended Conservative party conference. One member will attend the SNP Conference and one Member will attend the Green conference
7. In 2019, seven officers attended the Liberal Democrat Party conference, nine officers the Labour Party conference, nine officers the Conservative Party conference. Two officers will attend the SNP conference and one officer will attend Green Party Conference. Officers come from Communications Team, Remembrancer's Office, Innovation and Growth Directorate and CBT. The number of officers has remained relatively stable since 2016.
8. The increase in Corporation presence, the incremental rise in costs more generally and the expansion of the Corporation dinners have cumulatively led to the increase in the cost of delivering the City Corporation's party conference programme. This has not been matched by an increase in the local budget financing the activity.
9. The costs associated with Party Conference activity include:
  - a. Think tank partnerships: The City Corporation partners on average with four different think tanks throughout the season.
  - b. Dinner costs: venue hire, catering (wine, three-course meal), AV
  - c. Accommodation: members are provided with two nights' accommodation. To note that last minute cancellations are never refundable due to the fact that many hotels are booked out nine months ahead.
  - d. Party Conference passes: members are provided with a two-day commercial party conference pass on the days they select. Once again, passes are not refundable by the parties unless there are serious circumstances
  - e. Travel expenses: members are asked to book their own 1st class travel which they can then expense to the Corporate Affairs team
  - f. Subsistence: members are asked to send their expenses to the Corporate Affairs team.
10. In 2013, the City Corporation's total expenditure on party conference was £43,500.
11. In 2018 the City Corporation's total expenditure on party conference was £108,000, of which £40,000 was sourced from the Policy Initiatives Fund.
12. In 2019 the City Corporation's estimated total expenditure on party conference is £170,000, of which £40,000 was sourced from the Policy Initiatives Fund.

### **Cost-benefit analysis of current level of attendance**

The benefits of having a Members representing the City Corporation at Party Conference include:

- Demonstration of City Corporation interest in the policy issues and ability to contribute to policy debates
- Increased engagement opportunities
- Capacity to push City Corporation messaging from multiple angles
- Possibility to cover the full breadth of programme of events at Conference

The associated costs are financial.

### **Conclusion**

However in the light of the rising costs, it is suggested Members discuss the general level of attendance and engagements.

If changes are wanted a more detailed report will be produced at a later stage.